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Gavin Stevens: Intruder?

ROBERT H. ELIAS

Olga W. Vickery's perceptive comments about the role of Gavin Stevens in Faulkner's last three novels (*Faulkner Studies*, Spring 1953) provide the occasion for further scrutiny of Stevens's function in the consistently underrated *Intruder in the Dust*. For if some readers have not understood how Stevens may be regarded as a "disembodied Voice," even more readers have mistaken him for Faulkner's intrusive voice and, thinking that the novel presents merely what Edmund Wilson has called "William Faulkner's reply to the Civil-Rights Program," have condemned the book for failure to embody its values in the dramatic action. Such condemnation not only misreads Stevens's words but also ignores the part that they play in the development of the theme.

What must not be overlooked in reading *Intruder in the Dust* is that the story is, for all the interplay of character and ironic commentary, Chick Mallison's story—the account of his struggle toward maturity and the consequent understanding of his relationship to his society, with implications of what in fact society is defined as being. The narrative is from his point of view, and if sometimes a character as forceful as Lucas seems to dominate the story, it is nonetheless in terms of the effect on Chick's mind that the domination takes place and is relevant; likewise, if Gavin Stevens's attitudes, spoken or unspoken, appear, they appear dramatically, within the context of Chick's problems, and have a role as influences upon or instruments of Chick's final illumination. Stevens as a lawyer is a definer of order, and as a reflective observer of events is, we can agree, something of a moralist (at worst a propagandist); but as a person within Chick's experience he is more than definer or moralizer: he is one whose words Chick must reckon with, or, on occasion, one whose words are, because of Stevens's

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close communion with Chick, the objectification of Chick's thoughts:

Chapter Seven is, for purposes of evaluation, the crucial one. The action has already taken Chick from the attitude of merely uncritically accepting the world into which he was born to questioning that world and glimpsing the size of his question. Then here, in the drive to the graveyard, his Uncle Gavin's words pour forth in a rhetorical torrent. The language's movement beyond colloquialism into the strikingly literary and, in this context, the peculiarly complex may suggest that Faulkner wishes to add a special emphasis of his own concerning Southern "homogeneity" and the Northeast's "coastal spew"; but when one notes the way the uncle's words and the boy's reflections are juxtaposed, one realizes that Stevens's words are the boy's thoughts anticipated and articulated, defining the question whose size Chick has already felt and glimpsed. In addition, one observes that although in Stevens's mouth the argument is only a doctrine asserted, only propaganda, it is part of what Chick comes to accept and that in the process and effect of Chick's acceptance is a meaning that transcends the mere argument.

The argument about homogeneity is, moreover, not to be read as oratory reminiscent of Hitler's. In *Intruder* whites and Negroes (excepting those Negroes who are trying to escape North) are alike homogeneous. They constitute a society with a common purpose, common standards—that is, they make for a community, and the South, as Faulkner presents it, is a community. Now this presentation, in this context, is scarcely designed to defend the abridgement of Negro rights. Quite the contrary. Homogeneity demands the recognition of the Negro as a person; the pride in the South clearly implies here a pride in releasing the Negro, a pride in the culture productive of the insight that only in the act of recognition will the South define itself as the community it must be to continue. Where the North, full of a rootless or

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uprooted population and cheapened values, is dominated by exploiters of delusion and mediocrity, the South upholds an ideal, that of liberty and dignity, and to give reality to this ideal must resist the North by seeking to become responsible for the Negro's full freedom. The only meaningful reform is self-reform, and self-awareness is the obvious prerequisite.

Stevens's argument then is simply a formulation of what Chick's experience must force him to see for himself concerning his relation to his place and his time. In the concluding chapters Chick has to realize that he can no more deny his community than he can change the history that has created it. If he is ashamed at the crowd's running away instead of remaining to acknowledge their mistake, he also must remember that in turning their backs they have repudiated the fratricidal Gowries and that shame, exhibited in contrast to Lucas Beauchamp's challenging self-respect, must precede the recognition of such as Lucas. And he has also to see that if his insights enable him to judge his community, those insights are inseparable from the guilt or corruption of the society that has enabled him to develop the ideals and criteria making those insights possible. He is of his society and must pay the price for his values. "I was," he finally admits, "righteous." Just as he has had to work through to awareness, so must the others; and his awareness is, in part, awareness of that very fact. From regarding Lucas as a special case and cause for resentment he has progressed to shame for the whites and a consideration of the plight of his whole world, re-examining its necessary basis (or examining it for the first time) and sensing the meaning of its forms. The career of Chick's attitude leads Chick to see, in fine, that such a career is the only way to responsibility, that self-consciousness is the only basis for revising premises and hence the only means to genuine social reform, a conclusion of course true for any community anywhere.

The voice of Gavin Stevens is, consequently, a voice that serves as both conscience and consciousness. Stevens indicates the direction in which Chick's mind must and does move, and he encourages Chick to maintain the spirit of impatience that can enable him to proceed beyond the realm of action 'possible to Stevens. Faulkner's "program" or propaganda is, thus, hardly confined to Stevens's oratory but comprehends Chick's reaction to it and the implications of both the content and the fact of Chick's reflections. The argument of Chapter Seven is supported not in terms of its logic but in terms of how it helps Chick

see what he is, what men in society are, what they must be. There may be more than one kind of intruder in this story; Stevens, however, is not one. Disembodied his voice may be; but embodied in the novel it systematically and effectively is.

A Further Note on the Conclusion of "The Bear"

RUEL E. FOSTER

Carvel Collins in a recent issue of *Faulkner Studies* has posited an interesting explanation for the rather enigmatic conclusion to "The Bear." I would like to suggest an additional meaning for that conclusion.

Within the framework of the story itself we have seen at least two motifs carried forward: first, the psychic maturation of Ike McCaslin in terms of the age old hunt ritual and second, the defeat of the wilderness world by the encroaching machine civilization. Certainly a craftsman like Faulkner would not omit these motifs from the conclusion of his story, and I believe they can be demonstrated to be present in the following manner.

In the final scene of "The Bear" Ike McCaslin walks into a clearing and sees Boon Hogganbeck seated at the base of the "Gum Tree" furiously hammering with pieces of his dismembered gun to keep forty or fifty squirrels from escaping down the tree in which they are caught. Boon doesn't look up ". . . he merely shouted back at the boy in a hoarse strangled voice: 'Get out of here! Don't touch them! Don't touch a one of them! They're mine!'" And with this scene the story concludes.

In terms of the dramatic organization of the story this scene is obviously to be contrasted ironically with the heroic scene earlier in which Boon engages in the gigantic struggle with Old Ben and single-handed kills him with a knife. Boon is a true member of the arcana of the hunt. He has Indian blood in his veins. He has lived all his life within or close to the wilderness. He has acknowledged Sam Fathers (even though Sam is part Negro) as the high priest of the wilderness cult, and Boon has become his acolyte in the rites of the wilderness.

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It is Sam Fathers who captures and tames Lion, the only dog that is considered worthy to track down Old Ben, the symbolic totem of the wilderness clan clustered about Sam Fathers. But Sam turns the care and feeding of Lion over to Boon, his underling and acolyte. And once Sam has organized the final hunt which he knows will kill Old Ben, he deposes the actual rite of killing to Boon, a true member of the wilderness cult, who performs it not with a gun but, in the manner of the immemorial sacrificial rite, with a knife. This death scene is the dramatic high point of the story, and it is also the high point of Boon's life. All else is anti-climax to him. Faulkner highlights the scene with strong visual imagery—the straining combatants are caught immobile in an instant of time. They loom up agonized and frozen—like another Laocoon. "For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man astride its back, working and probing the buried blade." Within the context of the story this scene is majestic and heroic—and it is the Gotterdammerung of the wilderness and the wilderness clan.

After such glory, what follows for Boon? He drops from the narrative to reappear in the final scene half-maddened in an attempt to keep a few squirrels to himself, he who had once hunted and killed a giant, semi-legendary bear. Thus by the ironic juxtaposition of the two hunting scenes of which Boon is the center, Faulkner provides an objective correlative for Ike's mental state at the end of the story. Because Ike has realized suddenly, "Why Major de Spain had not come back, and that after this time he [Ike] himself, who had had to see it one time other would return no more."

Thus Ike's final sight of the maddened Boon Hogganbeck becomes an objective equivalent—and a jointure of the two major motifs of the story—for his mature realization that the true wilderness is broken, the heroic hunting age has passed and that for him, a glory has departed from the earth forever.

The Hamlet: Genesis and Revisions

PETER LISCA

When *The Hamlet* came out in 1940 it sustained one criticism in addition to the usual attacks on Faulkner's works—those of horror and unintelligibility: it was also found to have no unity. The extremists

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called it a "chaotic narrative," said that "God—and just possibly William Faulkner" knew what the story's "essential subject" was, and that the stories were connected "only by specious means." The more moderate accorded it the unity of a "cycle of stories" around a "central theme." This view of *The Hamlet's* unity was encouraged by the fact that Faulkner had previously published five of the book's episodes as short stories, two as early as 1931 and one in 1932. Also, *The Hamlet* had been preceded by another "collection" of short stories with a central theme—*The Unvanquished* (1938). While recent Faulkner criticism has done much to justify his "horror" and "unintelligibility," the structure and unity of *The Hamlet* have not received much attention.

There is plentiful evidence to indicate that this book is somewhat more than a mere "collection." *The Hamlet* is Faulkner's fourteenth book of fiction, but already in his third book, *Sartoris*, twelve years earlier, we have three Snopeses—Flem, Byron, Montgomery Ward—and the following passage occurs:

This Snopes [Montgomery Ward] was a young man, member of a seemingly inexhaustible family which for the last ten years had been moving to town in dribbles from a small settlement known as Frenchman's Bend. Flem, the first Snopes, had appeared unheralded one day behind the counter of a small restaurant on a side street, patronized by country folk. With this foothold and like Abraham of old, he brought his blood and legal kin household by household, individual by individual, into town, and established them where they could gain money. Flem himself was presently manager of the city light and water plant, and for the following few years he was a sort of handy man to the municipal government; and three years ago, to old Bayard's profane astonishment and unconcealed annoyance, he became vice president of the Sartoris bank, where already a relation of his [Byron] was a bookkeeper.

We have in this passage a summary of events which are not only post-*Hamlet* historically, but none of which had yet been written. In the short story "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard," which appeared in 1932 and later became the last episode of *The Hamlet*, Flem's possession of the restaurant is explained. In the story "Centaur in Brass" (1932) we have Flem's rise to superintendent of the light and water plant and his activities in that capacity. In addition, this same story summarizes material used in "Spotted Horses," later also incorporated into *The Hamlet*. We may note that the first mention of Snopes' spotted horses is in *As I Lay Dying*, published the year previous to the appearance of the short story about those horses. In *Sanctuary* (1931) we

learn that Clarence Snopes, state senator, is, according to Benbow's memory of ten years ago, the "son of a restaurant-owner, member of a family which had been moving from the Frenchman's Bend neighborhood into Jefferson for the past twenty years . . ."

In addition to this constant cross-reference, we have a letter by Faulkner, parts of which are quoted, undated, by Cowley in the *Portable* edition of Faulkner.

I wrote them ["The Hound" and "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard"] mainly because 'Spotted Horses' had created a character I fell in love with: the itinerant sewing-machine agent named Suratt. Later a man of that name turned up at home, so I changed my man to Ratliff. . . . Meanwhile my book [probably *Sartoris*] had created Snopes and his clan, who produced stories in later volumes: 'Mule in the Yard,' 'Brass,' etc. This over a period of about ten years, until one day I decided I had better start on the first volume or I'd never get any of it down."

This letter, which must date between 1940 and 1946 and refers to *The Hamlet* as the "first volume," raises certain difficulties. The Snopes clan first appeared in *Sartoris* (1929) two years before the appearance of "Spotted Horses" in *Scribner's*. It might be noted that one V. K. Suratt appears in *Sartoris*, thus placing it before the appearance of a character by that name in the vicinity of Oxford, Mississippi. Since Faulkner tells us that he originally conceived the name of the sewing-machine agent in "Spotted Horses" to be Suratt, this would date the appearance of the real Suratt between 1929 and 1931, between *Sartoris* and "Spotted Horses." There are two difficulties, however. "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard" and "Centaur in Brass" both appeared in February of 1932, nine months after Faulkner had changed to the name Ratliff. Yet, the sewing-machine agent in both these stories is called Suratt, which indicates that these two stories were written about two years earlier.

What all this shows is that Faulkner not only conceived of a Snopes saga as early as 1929, but had finished two of the sections which were to go into *The Hamlet* by 1931. In addition he had written "Centaur in Brass," which takes up Flem Snopes in Jefferson, having already usurped the other half of the restaurant he had gotten from Suratt and now functioning as manager of the Jefferson water works. Flem's marriage to Eula, the conditions of that marriage, their departure for Texas and their return were summarized as early as 1931 in "Spotted Horses." All this material firmly establishes the fact that Faulkner had in mind

the Snopes' basic character and the major outline of their progress plotted by key incidents nine years before *The Hamlet* appeared. One might say, then, that this book is not a re-publication of short stories, but rather that the short stories are previously published parts of a work-in-progress. Actually, these previously published stories comprise only one-fourth of the book.

If we turn now from external evidence to an examination of the stories themselves, it will be seen that they underwent extensive revision before re-appearing as parts of *The Hamlet*. "Barn Burning," the last story to be published (June, 1939), is the first to appear in *The Hamlet*. As originally published, the central figure is Colonel Sartoris Snopes, a young son of Ab Snopes. The story centers upon his disapproval of his father's actions and those of his older brother, undoubtedly Flem. He tries to warn De Spain of their plans, but too late, his father and brother having tied him to a bed to forestall this. In the end he runs away, tearfully ashamed of his family. In *The Hamlet*, the action takes place in the past, and Ratliff narrates it from memory. The little boy, main character of the story, is not even mentioned, and the episode is only one-third as long.

This episode serves several purposes: First, early in the book (p. 14) it gives an incident from the past history of the Snopeses which helps to characterize them. Secondly, it is Jody Varner's knowledge of this characteristic which makes possible the Snopes' foothold in Frenchman's Bend. (Jody didn't want *his* barn burned.) Thirdly, Ratliff, by making this tendency for arson known, becomes the indirect instrument of the Snopes' success. If these changes had not been made, the last two purposes of the episode could not have been served, and although we would still know the history of the Snopeses, the relation of that story to the rest of the book would have been broken both in tone or attitude towards the material and in the pattern of characters. By making these changes Faulkner gains much and loses only what has no place in the total structure of the book—the boy's attitude.

The next story to be incorporated into the book comes only ten pages later, "Fool About a Horse" (August, 1936). Like "Barn Burning," this story fills in the past history of the family patriarch—Ab Snopes. As first published it is told by Ab's little boy, the same one who appeared in "Barn Burning," and who seems to have been conceived as a moral conscience within the Snopeses. Although there are fewer changes in this story than in any other, they are significant. In

The Hamlet, the story is told by Ratliff to illustrate his opinion of Ab Snopes. Three times before going into the anecdote he tells his group of listeners that Ab "ain't naturally mean," but "just soured." When one asks him "How soured?" Ratliff gives a summary of the events concerning Ab in the stories "The Unvanquished" and "Vendee," both also published in 1936 and re-published in *The Unvanquished*. Ratliff ends his list by referring to an encounter between Ab and Pat Stamper which was so catastrophic that "he just went plumb curdled." Pat Stamper's fame as a horse trader naturally calls for the details of this encounter, and Ratliff tells the story, interrupting three more times during its course to remind his audience that Ab "wasn't curdled then."

This new version gives us not only another part of the Snopes' background, but a major character's attitude towards that background, and it is only through the information Ratliff gives about himself in this section that the Ratliff-Snopes feud can be fully understood. There is a marked difference between Ratliff's relations with Ab and those he has with Flem. Ratliff goes out of his way to be nice to Ab, as evidenced by his gift of whiskey, his visit with Ab, and his efforts to explain and justify Ab's disposition. This marked difference, for he obviously detests Flem, must be accounted for in any examination of Faulkner's "mythology." There are in *The Hamlet* three other Snopeses who do not seem to conform to the Snopes archetype—Mink, Eck, and Isaac. In addition, we have Colonel Sartoris Snopes, the little boy who revolts and runs away in "Barn Burning." It is interesting that only this little boy and Flem, two extremes of character, are Ab's sons, the others being some variety of "cousin."

The horse trading episode ends the flash-back section of the Snopes' history; the next previously published story incorporated into the book comes some two hundred pages later. This is the story called "The Hound" (August, 1931). In *The Hamlet* this story is four times as long and some great changes have been made. As first published, the story concerns a man called Ernest Cotton, of no relationship to the Snopeses—one of whom is working in Varner's store. Cotton is a bachelor, living alone in a cabin. Nothing is told of his past and very little concerning his motivation for the murder. We know nothing at all about Houston. The story begins with the shot. The whole point of the story concerns the murderer's efforts to cover his crime and his struggles with the dog. Finally the sheriff catches him.

As the episode appears in *The Hamlet*, several changes have been

made. The murderer is named Mink Snopes and invested with a fury, intensity and drive which he did not have as Ernest Cotton. He is a married man and has two children. The history of his marriage and its effect on him is given at some length, his wife figuring prominently in the account. The motive for murder is not only clearly defined, but tied in with the actions of all the major characters in the book. Houston and his dog and horse appear two hundred pages before he is murdered, and his conflict with Mink is gradually worked up through several incidents so that we expect the violent act. The history of Houston, about whom we know nothing in the story, takes up fifteen pages of *The Hamlet*. Even the dominant theme of the episode is changed. Lump Snopes, who takes the place of Flem in Varner's store while his relative is in Texas, figures prominently. He learns of the murder and comes to Mink for a share of the money which Houston was carrying in his wallet at the time of the murder. He refuses to believe that Mink killed Houston only for some principle—"Do you mean to tell me that you never even looked? *never even looked?*" A substantial part of the narrative deals with Lump's attempts to locate the corpse (for the wallet), and Mink's struggle to prevent him, Lump offering bribe and threatening blackmail. All this is new.

This episode is one of the most integral parts of the book. Houston's death at the hands of Mink is an objective correlative of the book's whole theme, and the love affairs of both Houston and Mink serve as points of perspective on Flem's winning of Eula. The struggle between Lump and Mink throws penetrating light on the essential Snopes character.

"Spotted Horses," which Cowley calls "the funniest American story since Mark Twain," is nearly three times as long in *The Hamlet* as it was when it appeared as a short story in *Scribner's* (June, 1931). In the short story, the action is narrated by Ratliff, who begins the tale with a description of the horses' escape and then works back to the arrival of the horses with Flem and the Texan. The main changes in the story are in the way of addition, expansion, and point of view. Whereas the short story ended with Ratliff giving Mrs. Armstid a bag of candy, in *The Hamlet* the action is carried on into a lawsuit in which the Tulls and Armstids, those injured by the spotted horses, try to sue the Snopeses for damages. This action shows the Snopeses in still another perspective—their alignment with the civil law in order to thwart the moral one.

"Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard" becomes the last episode in *The Hamlet*. Except for changes in language and style, designed, as the changes in the other stories, to give the book unity of style and perception, there is only one important change. Bookwright, rather than Tull, is the third partner with Ratliff and Armstid. This change is important for the book's theme because while Tull had been defeated in the lawsuit Bookwright had thus far been able to outwit the Snopeses, the only character besides Ratliff to do so.

In each episode, then, we can see a careful and often an extensive reworking of the material towards a closer integration of the book as a whole. While it is true that even with this reworking certain sections can stand on their own, this in no way detracts from the book's unity. A particularly effective scene from a well integrated play may have a dramatic value and unity in itself (indeed *must*), yet that dramatic value and unity are most fully realized only when set in its proper place in the play. In this connection it must be remembered that there exist other Snopes stories not "collected" in this volume, stories which cannot be fitted into the events of the book. This problem would not exist if *The Hamlet* were merely a "collection." Also, it must be kept in mind that, from what we can tell by the Faulkner letter quoted above, these extra stories are to be parts of "later volumes."

With Faulkner's intention and attempts at unity established, a clearer eye can be turned on the material itself. There are in *The Hamlet* a total of seven love stories: Eula-Labove, Eula and the group of suitors, McCarron-Eula, Houston-Lucy Pate, Mink and his wife, Flem-Eula, Isaac and the cow. This prominence of love motifs demands investigation. Is there here what Robert Penn Warren has called "a patterning of contrasts," and if so, what is the purpose of this pattern?

The three episodes preceding the marriage of Flem and Eula deal with the pre-marital sex quest, each involving Eula and illustrating a different kind of courtship. It is of course obvious that Eula, "the female principle made flesh," as one reviewer called her, is a fertility symbol, and that her possession must have symbolic value. The courtships of the suitors in the buggies, of Labove, and of McCarron have in common a violence of attraction which posits a recognition of her value. It is McCarron who, by a show of manhood through violence, finally possesses the fertility symbol in a consummating act. Of Flem, we have nothing but Eula's calm disregard, and his complete lack of sexual virility is described by Ratliff in his imaginary reconstruction of their

sexual relations—"And any sign-painter can paint him a screen to set up alongside the bed to look like looking up at a wall of store shelves of canned goods." Even Labove, while Eula was still in his schoolroom, could foresee accurately the fate of this fertility goddess.

He could almost see the husband which she would someday have. He would be a dwarf, a gnome, without glands or desire, who would be no more a physical factor in her life than the owner's name on the flyleaf of a book. . . . He saw it: the fine land rich and fecund and foul and eternal and impervious to him who claimed title to it, oblivious, drawing to itself tenfold the quantity of living seed its owner's whole life could have secreted and compounded, producing a thousandfold the harvest he could ever hope to gather and save.

The merging of sexual and agricultural images in this passage is significant for an understanding of Eula's symbolic meaning. Even the many suitors who fought among themselves or together against McCarron sensed this larger significance of Eula, and "put in a final and despairing bid for the guilt they had not compassed, the glorious shame of the ruin they did not do." Everyone is aware except Flem Snopes, for whom Eula exists as the price paid for a piece of land, itself the symbol of lordship over Frenchman's Bend. For this and this alone he takes to wife a woman who, as the whole town knows, will bear him a bastard within six months.

The three love affairs following Flem's marriage to Eula are those of Houston, Isaac, and Mink. In Houston we have the romantic ideal of the fated lovers, re-united after long separation. His marriage is ideal and her death never forgotten, her love kept alive by a ritual of self-torture. In the love of Isaac for the cow we see even an idiot, and a Snopes idiot, rise to purple passions, rescuing his loved one (the burning barn) at grave peril and suffering body wounds in consequence. Their "honeymoon" is idyllic in a poetic landscape, their very union sanctioned, like that of Dido and Aeneas, by symbolic lightning (the heavens fertilizing the earth), thunder and a shower of rain, the idiot, lover-like, bringing delicacies and garlands of wild flowers to his loved one. Even Mink, another Snopes, shows in his marriage a virility and force which though expended on a quadroon and nymphomaniac endows him with manhood. His first name applies to more than his killer instincts. From these vantage points the marriage of Flem and Eula becomes symbolic of the main theme of the novel, indeed, almost sheer allegory.

In addition to this thematic unity by a "patterning of contrasts,"

the novel has a growing action, a straightforward plot development. This main line of plot development is the symbolic and actual capture of Frenchman's Bend by the Snopeses. Their advance is resisted on two planes of action: the community, and Ratliff. These two planes of resistance are never confused, although Ratliff sympathizes with the community:

I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folks that can't wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I won't. I won't, I tell you!

The conquest of the community begins with Jody's hiring Flem for his store. Once Flem is entrenched, he brings in various relatives to run the blacksmith shop, the school, a piece of land lost by Houston, and the store while he is in Texas. The total conquest of the community comes in the episode about the spotted horses, through their elusiveness and strangeness themselves symbolic of all the material things conjured up by Mephistopheles to trick mankind. The episode directly involves all the characters in the book. It is a communal defeat at the hands of Flem, and the lawsuit which follows establishes the legality of that utter defeat. It is the climax of the struggle on the community level of resistance.

After the spotted horses incident there remain only two characters in Frenchman's Bend who have not succumbed to the Snopeses—Ratliff and Bookwright. Ratliff is built up to be the logical enemy of Flem Snopes, the only person (except Will Varner) of equal shrewdness, and his moral struggle against the Snopeses is evident throughout the book. Each of his first two engagements with them, the goat episode and his efforts to keep Lump from using Isaac as a showpiece, end in a draw. But as the penultimate episode of the book is a communal defeat, the concluding episode, the digging for buried treasure, presents the defeat of Ratliff and also Bookwright, the only two characters who had thus far stood firm. The episode brings to an end a tension set up at the very beginning of the novel and sustained throughout. The Snopes' conquest of the hamlet is now complete.

This analysis does not begin to explore the complex symbolism and character evaluation of the novel, but I have tried to show that it is a novel, as evidenced by the history of its writing, the many changes in the individual stories, and its patterned contrasts and rising action.

REVIEW

O'Connor, William Van. *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1953, 182 pp.

William van O'Connor proposes "to offer a coherent interpretation of Faulkner's fiction," which, though it claims an indebtedness to the O'Donnell-Cowley-Warren view of Faulkner's work as an extended symbol of the Southern legend, finds that the Sartoris-Snopes formula and the Traditional Past vs. Amoral Present formula are at best merely tangential. O'Connor believes, rather, that the constant center in Faulkner is "a faith in man as a being capable of selflessness, endurance, love, and honor."

After an introductory account of Faulkner's background, youth, and education, O'Connor describes the literary and personal influences on the young writer during his period of apprenticeship. Playing the eccentric young genius, Faulkner engaged in a series of shenanigans, absorbed the romanticism of Keats and Swinburne as well as the disillusionment of the post-war lost generation, and wrote a volume of derivative verse entitled *The Marble Faun*. O'Connor traces in the works of his immaturity (*Soldier's Pay*, written in six weeks at the suggestion of Sherwood Anderson, *Mosquitoes*, and *Sartoris*) elements which, despite Faulkner's self consciousness and artificiality, were to become characteristic of his major work: a tremendous rhetoric, a grim sense of violence, and a compassionate characterization.

In 1929, according to O'Connor, Faulkner emerged as a major writer with *The Sound and The Fury*. With his discussion of this novel, O'Connor begins a series of incisive chapters which extract the major themes from the tangled fire of Faulkner's prose; he believes this critical task is necessary because Faulkner, deeply immersed in the experimental technique of the twentieth century novel, adhered to the "code of the impressionist school that a scene be rendered, not reported or narrated. Faulkner is usually faithful to this part of the impressionist code, even to the point of refusing to inject a word or to interpolate a sentence or two which might greatly clarify the meaning of a scene." Of course, no reviewer's summary can do justice to an analytical technique which seeks to cut through the novelist's complex form, dramatic content, and significant imagery to reach the central core of meaning in each novel; however, for whatever value they may have out of context, these are

O'Connor's conclusions concerning the themes of the first two major novels:

The Sound and the Fury: "Quentin and his obsessions are treated with obvious sympathy, and it could well be that in Quentin one finds the central issue . . . the man of sensibility studying his own identity, searching for significance in a world that is not sure it believes in any."

As I Lay Dying: "Addie Bundren is the center of the story. . . . We live, she believes, by violating our aloneness. Words like *love* and *sin*, which signify the violations, are too often abused, used meaninglessly. . . . The theme . . . would seem to invite the dividing of people into those who accept the bitterness and the violence of living and those who do not."

These themes, says O'Connor, "were to persist in novel after novel," and novel after novel, O'Connor pursues them, finding developments and variations, and attempting to isolate the sympathetic character or characters who bear the basic philosophical message in each work.

As he carries out his main task, O'Connor also explores Faulkner's techniques and aims. He analyzes, for example, the pattern of imagery and metaphor that raise *Sanctuary* far above the horrific pot-boiler Faulkner sought to create in order to achieve popular success; the treatment of "local" subjects—Chickasaw Indians, Negro slaves, and decayed Southern aristocracy—in *These Thirteen*; the excessive and depraved Calvinism and psychology which help to make *Light in August* a great work of literary art; the autobiographical experience and the belief in the dehumanizing effects of the machine age that are essential elements of *Pylon*; the weight of the South's history of violence, horror, and miscegenation that is intricately involved in Faulkner's most personal novel, *Absalom! Absalom!*; the counterpoint of restrained and unrestrained love that tie the two stories of *The Wild Palms* together; the folk traditions and the wilderness rituals that involve comedy and tragedy in *The Hamlet* and *Go Down, Moses*; the regional detective story of the South that is created by *Intruder in the Dust* and *Knight's Gambit*; and finally, the Christian theme of Atonement of "Faulkner's strangest book," *Requiem for a Nun*, which is a "failure or relative failure."

Throughout these literary examinations, O'Connor gives us also a running account of Faulkner the man—his relations with his wife, his

daughter, his brothers, his neighbors, his hunting and drinking companions, and his public.

Since all this is packed into only 161 pages of actual text, (largely a chronological arrangement of articles previously published in little magazines), the reader may feel that at times the pace is a bit too hurried and at other times that details are being overly labored. But seen against the background of the large body of Faulkner criticism that measures his work in terms of the history of the American South, O'Connor's study may serve the necessary purpose of re-orienting us toward what is much more fundamental—Faulkner, the philosophical artist who, despite his limitations, is “far and away, the best American novelist in the first half of the twentieth century.”

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Notes and Comments

Robert Daniel (Dept. of English, Univ. of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn.) is preparing a second edition of *A Catalogue of the Writings of William Faulkner*, and would appreciate information about first book-appearances and about Faulkner's work in Hollywood.

Peter Lisca's article on *The Hamlet* is particularly welcome to these pages because, with Mr. Lisca, we feel that *The Hamlet* is one of Faulkner's best, but unfortunately often neglected or misunderstood, novels. It would be interesting and useful to see more work done along the lines Mr. Lisca has indicated.

English Institute Essays—1952, edited by Alan S. Downer, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1954), was received too late for review in this issue. Essays by Lawrance Thompson, Cleanth Brooks, Carvel Collins and Perrin Lowrey on *The Sound and The Fury* comprise half the book.